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INTRODUCTION

Linking Western Mindfulness to Early Buddhism

Mindfulness and mindfulness meditation were first introduced to U.S. psychotherapy by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1984) with a mindfulness meditation program for the treatment of patients experiencing chronic pain. Kabat-Zinn said, “Mindfulness meditation has roots in Theravāda Buddhism where it is known as *sattipatana* [sic] *vipassanā* or Insight Meditation” (1984, p. 34). The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* defines *mindfulness* as “awareness of one’s internal states and surroundings . . . to help people avoid destructive or automatic habits and responses by learning to observe their thoughts, emotions, and other present-moment experiences without judging or reacting to them” (American Psychological Association, n.d.). In the APA secular definition, mindfulness is mere awareness without judging or reacting. The secular mindfulness meditation method has often been used for relaxation with the goal of inducing a state of calm. Mindfulness approaches have been manualized and promulgated for application in school classroom exercises with children, executive coaching, and yoga in exercise gymnasiums, to name just a few, and as part of treatment approaches for illnesses ranging from stress and chronic pain to cancer. Additionally, there has been a proliferation of web-based or

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smartphone applications that can be downloaded to any mobile device and guide the user through meditative breathing, relaxation exercise, or both.

In the arena of psychotherapy, there have been three major mindfulness-based treatment approaches for the treatment of psychological distress and mental illness: mindfulness-based stress reduction, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, and dialectical behavior therapy. Acceptance and commitment therapy uses mindfulness and meditation techniques that are integrated into its own theoretical approach to psychotherapy. Studies regarding the use of these intervention programs report their efficacy and effectiveness for the intended client population (see Britton et al., 2012; Eeles & Walker, 2022; Goldberg et al., 2018; Kriakous et al., 2021; Linardon et al., 2024; Querstret et al., 2020).

As Kabat-Zinn (1984) noted, mindfulness meditation has roots in Buddhism, but the meditation practices used in mindfulness-based psychotherapy are taught independent of the religious and cultural beliefs associated with them from their countries and traditions of origin. This is because in the United States, “mindfulness meditation is intellectually and experientially unfamiliar in our culture” (Kabat-Zinn, 1984, p. 34). Kabat-Zinn reasoned that because Western culture does not share the same religious and cultural beliefs as traditional Buddhist cultures in Asia, Americans would reject Eastern religious practices if mindfulness meditation were closely linked to Buddhism. This deletion of the context within which mindfulness meditation was developed has contributed to the adoption of mindfulness meditation technique without theory. Although there is evidence that meditation and mindfulness-based interventions work, there is no explanation as to why they work. Explication of why a technique is efficacious necessitates a theory. Indeed, mindfulness-based interventions within the field of mental health intervention have been limited to the level of technique, without a theoretical basis. Without a theoretical foundation, further development and research on this approach is limited (Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015).

This book seeks to remedy the situation by providing the theory for mindfulness meditation and thus linking modern mindfulness-based psychotherapy with its early Buddhist roots. We will present the teachings of the Siddhartha Gotama Shakyamuni—the founder of Buddhism, also referred to as simply the Buddha Gotama—as cited in the early Buddhist texts of the *Nikāya*, which is the documentation of the more than 10,000 talks given by the Buddha during his 45 years of teaching. We present the Buddha’s theory on the human experience of existence, which is the theoretical basis of mindfulness meditation and one of the mechanisms the Buddha Gotama used to relieve suffering or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*, which is discussed

extensively in this book) and increase joy and satisfaction in life (*sukha*). Furthermore, other intervention techniques taught by the Buddha Gotama, in addition to mindfulness meditation, will be introduced, discussed, and examined for clinical use in mental health treatment. Our hope is that by providing the theory for mindfulness, meditation, and mindfulness-based psychotherapies, we will enable researchers, practitioners, and theorists to expand their understanding of mindfulness and ultimately develop new interventions for psychotherapy. Theory allows us to hypothesize what techniques will work, so researchers can develop and test new techniques. Examining the place of insight, mindfulness meditation, and other interventions from early Buddhism provides a much fuller understanding of why mindfulness meditation offers efficacious techniques for mental health interventions.

To highlight the promise of theory, if we examine the literature in early Buddhism, it is evident that U.S. mindfulness interventions are extremely limited. One of the primary texts in which the Buddha taught meditation is the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (*Majjhima Nikāya* [MN], 1995, 10: The Foundations of Mindfulness). The text outlines four large categories for objects of meditation. The first category is the body. Contemplation of the body starts with the breath, with four further subcategories for meditations on the body. After the body, the text then specifies three more categories, each of which contains numerous subcategories, for meditation. The present-day mindfulness interventions build on only one part of the first of four objects of contemplation explicated in this text. With an expanded understanding of how mindfulness works that includes all four categories of contemplation, psychotherapists can offer new treatment options to alleviate clients' suffering.

A NOTE ABOUT THE SCOPE OF THIS BOOK

Those who are Buddhist and have their own extensive practice may notice that the approach taken in this book is extremely narrow. It does not fully encompass the overall approach that the Buddha took in addressing the experience of and liberation from suffering. Rather, the book maintains a narrow focus because it is written for psychotherapists who may or may not be Buddhist. We limit the scope of this book to the material that we see as applicable to the process of psychotherapy.

The intent of this book is to translate the lexicon used in early Buddhist texts to the lexicon used in the mental health field so that ideas from early Buddhism are more accessible to psychology. The approach taken and the

subjects selected in this book assume that the reader holds the necessary foundational knowledge and skills to enter into the study of a theoretical orientation for psychotherapy. The terminology used in this book is intended for mental health practitioners looking to respecialize in a different theoretical orientation, researchers and developers of mental health intervention programs, and graduate students in mental health fields such as psychology, clinical social work, counseling, and other mental health professions.

There is a long Buddhist tradition of commentaries on the mind, because a large portion of Buddhist practice concerns itself with the mind. The Buddha said:

I don't envision a single thing that—when untamed, unguarded, unprotected, unrestrained—leads to such great harm as the mind. . . . I don't envision a single thing that—when tamed, guarded, protected, restrained—leads to such great benefit as the mind. (Ekadhamma Suttas; *Aṅguttara Nikāya* [AN], 2012, 1:39: The Mind: A Single Thing)

There are abundant current publications on Buddhism and psychology or counseling (e.g., by Padmasiri De Silva, Mark Epstein, Beth Jacobs, and George Lee) as well as on Buddhism and the mind (e.g., by David Kalupahana, Y. K. Karunadasa, Geshe Lhundub Sopa, Tenzin Gyatso the 14th Dalai Lama, and Thich Nhat Hanh). There is also a tradition for Buddhist practitioners and scholars to first approach the teachings of the Buddha with fresh eyes prior to engaging with the commentaries and the published literature. This book takes the second approach, with fresh eyes from the authors. As such, there is an absence of what social science would normally consider a necessary review of the scholarly literature in this book. However, this book's take on the meaning of early Buddhist texts does not significantly deviate from the commentarial Theravāda Buddhist interpretation of these texts.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The content of this book provides a more thorough examination into Buddhism as it relates to a theoretical orientation for psychotherapy. This book is organized around a key tenet of Buddhism, which is the *three marks of existence*. According to the Buddha, there are three universal truths, or marks, of existence; these can be thought of as laws of reality. They are laws in the same sense as used by Thorndike (1911) in his *Laws of Behavior in General* (p. 241). The three marks of existence (with Pali terms in parentheses), as stated in the *Khuddaka Nikāya Dhammapada* (Dhp; 1996, 277–279: The Path), are as follows:

- All conditioned things are impermanent (*aniccā*).
- All things are not-self (*anattā*).
- All conditioned things are unsatisfactory (*dukkha*).

In other words, suffering occurs when people fail to understand, acknowledge, and recognize these three marks of existence, instead craving for reality to be different than it is. We will explore each of these three marks in depth, along with the Buddha's remedy for suffering and how this applies to modern psychotherapy. Along the way, we will discuss the Buddhist framework of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

Part I (Chapters 1 and 2) provides an overview of the philosophical and cultural context of Buddhism, as well as how Buddhist psychotherapy differs from the Buddhism religion and Buddhist practices. Part II (Chapter 3) covers one mark of existence, which is impermanence (*aniccā*). Part III (Chapters 4–6) covers another mark, which is the not-self (*anattā*). Part IV (Chapters 7–12) covers a third mark, which is *dukkha*. Finally, Part V (Chapters 13–18) covers the use of Buddhist interventions for psychotherapy in the format of the Noble Eightfold Path.